

Near South Neighborhood Focus Area Action Plan

Introduction



Above and below: 1201 S. 15th Street, different owners, 80 years -- consistent care helps preserve Near South's history and housing.



Since 1993, an important neighborhood revitalization strategy for the City of Lincoln has been to concentrate its limited community development resources in relatively small areas (12 to 30 blocks). This strategy was developed in order to achieve demonstrable improvements in the short term by encouraging private investment, increasing confidence in the area, and creating a spillover effect for reinvestment.

Four target areas, parts of the Everett, Near South, South Salt Creek, and Woods Park neighborhoods, were established in 1993. Neighborhood committees worked with the City's Urban Development staff to identify problems and develop goals and strategies. These were summarized in an Action Plan for each area, a "blueprint" for revitalization for the next 3 to 5 years. The neighborhood working committees maintained a major role in implementing the Action Plans.

By 1996, activities in the "old" target areas began winding down, and the process of selecting new neighborhood revitalization areas was started. New selection criteria were developed, with emphasis on areas that are strategically located with respect to public buildings, major thoroughfares, and activity centers. In other words, those areas where revitalization would significantly affect not only the perceptions of neighborhood residents, but of the community-at-large and visitors to the City. This led to a focus on the residential areas surrounding Lincoln's downtown business core.

These new areas are substantially different from the "old" target areas. Housing deterioration and environmental problems -- such as litter, junk -- are more severe, and there are more complaints to Codes, Health, and the Police Departments. Residential density is greater, and there is a high degree of investor-ownership, even of single-family housing. The greater needs in these areas required a more comprehensive approach to revitalization, and resulted in the creation of the Focus Area Concept.

The Focus Area Concept calls for working with neighborhood committees and with a group (the Focus Area Concept Team or FACTeam) of representatives from various city departments, including Building & Safety, Public Works, Planning, Parks and Recreation, Health, Police, and Urban Development. The FACTeam, like the neighborhood committees, also works together to identify problems, concerns, and issues in these areas, and to develop programs and strategies to improve these areas. The inclusion of the FACTeam at the beginning of the planning process brings additional perspectives and resources to the revitalization of these areas.

Acknowledgements

The Near South Neighborhood Association, the committee for the development of the Focus Area Plan, residents in the Focus Area who provided their input, and the City of Lincoln Focus Area Concept Team [or FACTeam].

December, 1997

Neighborhood History

The Near South Neighborhood, located immediately south of Lincoln's downtown, in an area bounded by "G" and South, 13th and 27th Streets, is one of the City's oldest and most historically significant residential areas.

One part of the neighborhood was contained within the City's original plat of 1867 and another part was platted in 1870 as the Capitol Addition (17th to 20th, "A" to "F"), which developed into the most exclusive residential area in Lincoln. During the 1880's, Lincoln's most prominent and wealthy citizens built mansions here. In 1905 the south-east edge of the Capitol Addition, the Fitzgerald Estate, was subdivided into the Mt. Emerald Addition ("A" to "D", 19th to 20th).

Between 1887 and 1925, as Lincoln grew and the central business district expanded, the neighborhood was completely developed. Apartment houses were constructed near the Capitol and the downtown area. Areas to the south, east, and west of the Capitol and Mt. Emerald Additions developed with large homes mixed with some apartment buildings and more modest housing. South of "A" and west of 20th Street there are modest late Victorian houses built as early as the late 1880's; others to the east of 20th Street are more pretentious Neo-Eclectic homes from the early 1900's and into the 1920's. The area's housing varied widely in architectural style, housing type and scale, and provided a unique mixture of late 19th and early 20th century buildings. Almost all of the architecturally significant structures constructed in Lincoln during this period are located in the Near South Neighborhood.

A transformation of the area began in the 1930's and 40's, first with the Depression and then with an exodus of residents to the "suburbs," where more modern homes with their amenities were available. Homes in the Near South began to suffer from lack of maintenance, many were left vacant or converted into apartments which were allowable under the City's zoning ordinance. Today it is generally recognized that the zoning of this area to permit multi-family units put undue economic pressure on the area, and resulted in the demolition of single-family housing. In its place, apartment buildings were constructed that were totally incompatible -- in form, scale and texture -- with the area's original buildings. This degradation of the area's original character led to further disinvestment by residents and absentee owners.

During the 1980's, homeowners began to return to the Near South, attracted by the stately homes that could be purchased at affordable prices. Many deteriorated structures were returned to their original condition, often being "deconverted" from apartments to single family dwellings. Today, while deteriorated housing conditions continue to plague some areas of the neighborhood, many areas display well-maintained houses with landscaped yards that indicate a pride of ownership, and provide a sense of revitalization.

Neighborhood Description

The Near South Neighborhood, with almost 11,000 people in a land area of approximately one square mile, is one of Lincoln's most densely populated neighborhoods. The neighborhood contains over 4,500 rental units, which comprise more than 75% of its housing units. Most of the neighborhood's rental units are in structures containing 5 or more units, however, about 950 of the area's rental units are in one- and two-family structures. This means that over 40% of the neighborhood's single family housing is for rent.



The historic Palisades Apartment Buildings at 17th and D Streets.



Above and below: Small house at 1704 D St. before and after a paint "facelift" in colors it might have "worn" when it was first built.



Townhouses on 15th Street, between C and D Streets, in the Capitol Environs District, which impacts design requirements for new construction in that area.

About 40% of the residents of the Near South are persons aged 18 to 29 years, an indication of the large number of college students who rent apartments or homes in this area. The neighborhood is also home to a large number of college-educated persons. According to the 1990 Census, 34.3% of the persons aged 25 and over in the Near South had a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 28.7% for the city as a whole.

About 25% of the houses in the Near South have been converted from their original use as a single-family dwelling into two or more dwelling units. Between 30% and 40% of these conversions are owner-occupied. Of the area's almost 1,300 homeowners, 54.4% are under age 45 (compared with 45.9% in the City). Over 60% of the homeowners have lived in the area for 5 or more years, indicating some stability amid the transient college population.

Focus Area Description

The Near South Focus Area consists of all of 28 blocks and parts of 7 blocks in an area bounded by "A", 13th, "H", and 17th Streets (both sides of 17th and "A" Streets are included in the focus area). The major arterials of 16th and 17th Street run through the area and major arterials of 13th and "A" Streets form boundaries of the focus area. At the north end of the focus area is the Nebraska State Capitol, with the Governor's Mansion included within the boundary. Dividing the focus area in half, east and west, is 15th Street. This boulevard centers on the Nebraska State Capitol Building, forming the southern axis of the Capitol Environs.

The area is primarily residential in nature and predominately multifamily, with many of the multiple rental units contained in what were once large single-family homes. These conversions, along with the newer multiple unit apartment buildings, are largely a result of the high density residential zoning of the area (R-6, R-7, R-8). The area also contains part of the commercial area along 13th Street (between "D" and "G" Streets), and is home to seven churches.

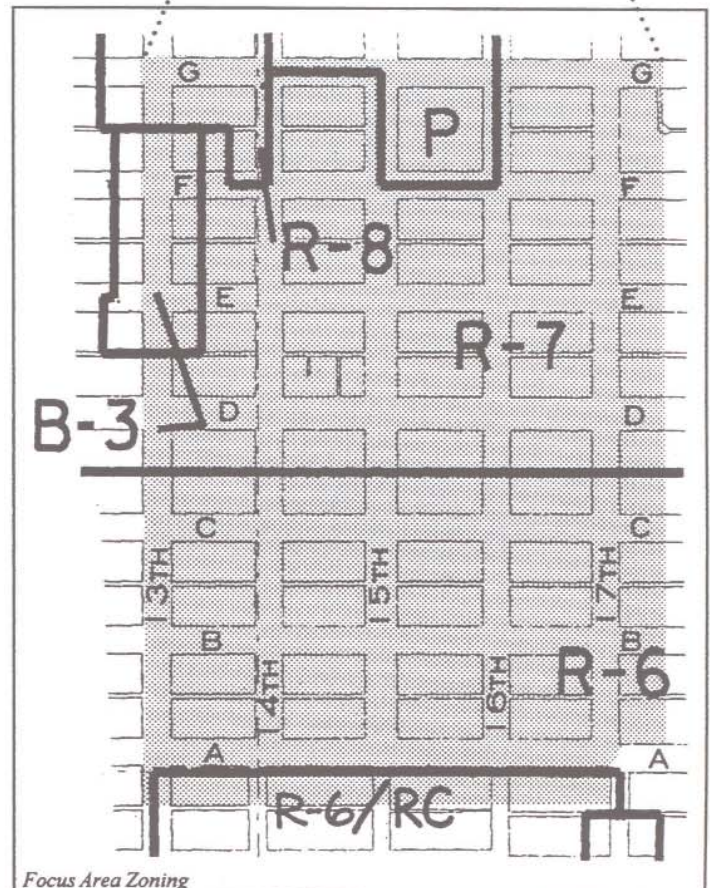
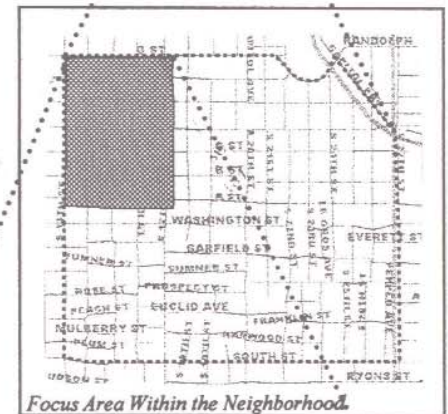
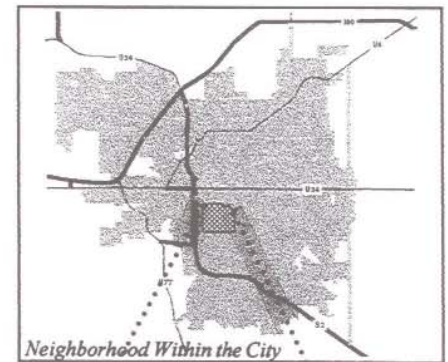
Population and Housing Analysis

The Near South Focus Area is home to about 2,400 people—22% of the neighborhood's total population. Seventeen percent of the area's population (403 persons) is enrolled in college. Only 8.3% of the population (199 persons) is under the age of 18 years, and eight percent (192 persons) are 65 years or older.

There are 1,585 households in the focus area, comprising 28.5% of the Near South neighborhood's households. Over 63% of these (999 households) are single-person households and about 20% (320 households) are family households. Only 16% (53) of the families have children, and eighty-seven percent of these (46 families) are headed by single women.

Over eighty-five percent of the focus area population is low or moderate income (lives in households earning 80% or less than the City's median income), and over one-fourth (525 persons) of the non-college population lives in poverty. More than seventy percent (1129 households) of the area's households earn less than \$20,000 annually.

The area contains 1,594 dwelling units, about 27% of the neighborhood's total dwelling units. These units are contained in 348 structures, with more than 70% of the units located in structures with 5 or more units. The area has 262 single-family "type" housing structures—about 75% of the area's total structures. About 55% of these structures are conversions from single family to multiple dwelling use (compared to a 25% "conversion rate" for the Near South as a whole). Forty percent of these (106 structures) are owner-occupied (6.7% of Near South's total



Near South Neighborhood At-A-Glance

Source: 1990 U.S. Census

	Near South Focus Area	Near South	City
Population	2,389	10,878	191,972
% Minority Persons, incl. Hispanic	6.8	13.8	6.8
% Persons 18-29 years	NA	39.5	25.9
Number of Households (HH)	1,585	5,568	75,402
% One Person HH's	63.0	47.0	28.8
% HH's that are Families	20.2	37.1	62.8
% of Elderly Persons in HH	8.0	7.0	10.3
Number of Homeowners	106	1,284	43,818

Number of Dwelling Units	1,594	5,915	79,079
% Owner-Occupancy	6.7	23.0	58.4
% Owners in same home 5 or + years	NA	60.7	63.4
% Owners 25-44 years old	NA	52.7	44.4
% Single family detached dwellings	6.7	26.3	58.7
% of Units in Structures with 1-4 Units	29.8	54.3	73.8
% Units Built Before 1940	54.1	49.7	20.2

Median Household Income	NA	\$17,178	\$28,186
Median Family Income	NA	\$24,177	\$36,189
% Families earning < \$15,000	52.4	29.1	12.7
% Families below Poverty	22.0	16.9	6.4
Median Home Value	NA	\$44,800	\$61,600
Median Gross Rent	NA	\$324	\$379

NA = Not Available

Housing Conditions by Ownership Type Near South Focus Area

Rating	Owner-Occupied		Investor-Owner		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Excellent	0	0.00	1	0.40	1	0.29
Good	38	40.0	107	42.29	145	41.67
Fair to Good	49	51.58	98	38.74	147	42.24
Fair to Poor	8	8.42	42	16.60	50	14.37
Poor	0	0.00	5	1.98	5	1.44
Dilapidated	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	95	100.00	253	100.00	348	100.00

Based on 1997 Housing Condition Survey and
County Assessor Ownership / Address data.

homeowners), including seventeen percent of the "conversions".

A housing conditions survey completed in the spring of 1997 indicates that the area has 55 structures in need of major rehabilitation. Over 85% of these (47 structures) are investor owned. Twenty-two percent (12 structures) of these are located directly on 15th Street (the south axis of the Capitol Environs). The survey also indicated that at least 147 structures in this area are in need of minor rehabilitation. Of these, two-thirds are investor owned.

Capitol Environs

Fifteenth Street divides the Near South Focus Area in half, east from west, and forms the South Axis of the Capitol Environs. This street, constructed in 1912, has a 120 foot right-of-way with avenue medians from "A" Street to the Capitol. A landscape design plan for the South Mall was partially implemented in 1935. This plan was prepared by Ernst Heminghaus, the same landscape architect who developed the landscape design for the Capitol grounds. Heminghaus' design concept called for low median plantings (maximum height of five feet), with 250 maple trees lining the street. Sixty years ago, the center islands were planted as designed, but the uniform rows of street trees were never realized. However, virtually nothing exists of the 1935 landscape today.

In 1985, a new design for the South Mall was developed based on Heminghaus' design concept of a broad tree-lined avenue. This plan, developed by Alfieri Sinclair and Hille, Architects, and Kim Todd, landscape architect, again calls for a low planting scheme for the center islands, and uniform trees lining the eight block avenue, but also proposes the reversal of the existing street tree line and the sidewalks (the sidewalks are moved closer to the street and the trees are located between the sidewalk and the adjacent buildings). The street trees and center island evergreen shrubs and perennials are designed to provide a gradation of summer and winter color from A Street to the Capitol at H Street. This plan also calls for the closure of "C" and "E" Streets (and perhaps "B" and "F" Streets), with the nodal areas formed by the street closures at "C" and "E" further developed into tree-canopied seating areas with flower beds to provide "mini-parks" for a neighborhood in need of public park space. (It should be noted that street closures as proposed were considered a long range improvement.) An ornamental street lighting scheme is designed to line both sides of 15th Street and match the original lamps surrounding the Capitol grounds.

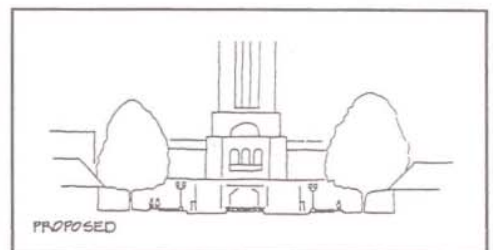
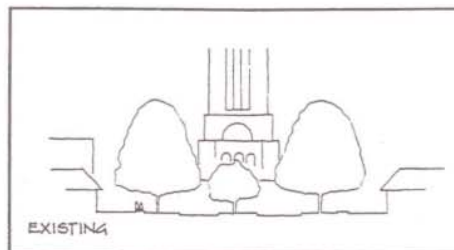
Anyone who wants to get an idea of this design plan should look at the first block south of the Capitol grounds, between "H" and "G" Streets. Here the plan has been implemented with relocated concrete sidewalks that have a spaced granite inlay pattern, and new street trees. South of "G" Street the mall has a different

look, one of neglect and decay. Existing planting materials in the medians and along the sides of the street are a hodgepodge of deciduous and conifers trees, most of them so oversized that they obscure the vista to the Capitol.

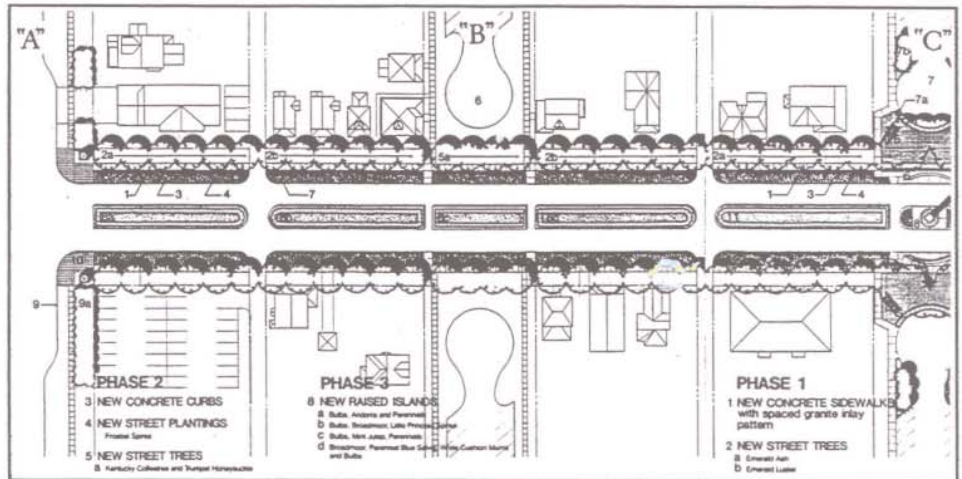
This Focus Area plan calls for the Near South Neighborhood Association to work with the Capitol Environs Commission to begin implementation of the plan for the remaining part of the South Mall, beginning with redevelopment of the medians and realignment of the sidewalks and street

trees through the removal and replacement of existing street trees. The proposal is to work with the approval of adjacent landowners to implement the plan in an orderly, consistent fashion, dealing simultaneously with both sides of whole blocks.

At this time, a significant investment is planned for the renovation of Centennial Mall (north of the Capitol), so it is unlikely that an additional expenditure of public funds, outside of available federal community development resources, can be committed to this project within the 3 to 5 year timeframe of this plan. It is hoped that the improvements made under this plan will provide the City, State, and private sector with the impetus needed to fully develop the South Mall as envisioned.



Above Left: Existing South Mall street profile. Above Right: Proposed South Mall street profile.
Below: Plan view of portion of Proposed South Mall, courtesy of Capitol Environs Commission.



Strengths

- ◆ Substantially-sized, well-built homes comprise the majority of single-family type structures. Many of these homes have historic and architectural attributes that make them attractive to home buyers.
- ◆ Convenient location to downtown, city campus of UNL, government offices and large downtown employers.
- ◆ Active, concerned, successful neighborhood organization that has developed goals and is committed to implementation of these goals. The Near South Neighborhood Association has been in existence for over 20 years.
- ◆ A degree of reinvestment is already occurring in the neighborhood, due to homeowners better maintaining their homes.
- ◆ Capitol Environs Commission regulates development within half of the focus area (one block on either side of 15th Street) and prevents incompatible slip-in development from occurring.
- ◆ Location of the South Mall within this area may provide access to resources for implementation of improvements identified in the Capitol Environs plan.

Concerns

- ◆ Deferred maintenance of housing stock by investor owners and by owner occupants.
- ◆ Focus area has few homeowners, with most of the single family homes converted to multiple dwellings. This has caused an increase in density beyond what was originally intended in this area.
- ◆ Perception that there is a high incidence of crimes against persons and property.
- ◆ Environmental blight related to housing, such as discarded furniture and appliances, in yards or on porches, lack of yard maintenance and upkeep, deteriorated sidewalks, etc.
- ◆ Little or no recreational/green space available to residents.
- ◆ Haphazard placement and varying species of oversized trees obscure the view to the Capitol and add to the appearance of decay and decline.
- ◆ Deteriorated housing, very costly repair because of its size and condition, may discourage prospective buyers.
- ◆ High-density residential zoning discourages maintenance of single family investment properties, encourages demolition of existing housing and infill with "slip-in" apartment complexes.

NEAR SOUTH NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION: AN ORGANIZATION OF CITIZENS CONCERNED WITH HISTORIC PRESERVATION, REVITALIZATION OF OLDER PROPERTIES AND MAINTENANCE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD FOR LOW DENSITY LAND USE

Near South Focus

Residential Goals	Actions	Schedule	Who
Rehabilitate the existing housing stock, with emphasis on properties located along major arterials and the South Axis of the Capitol Environs	Provide funding for the major rehabilitation of 8 owner- occupied dwellings and 20 rental structures	1997-2000	City UDD
	Provide funding for the minor rehabilitation of 30 owner-occupied dwellings and 30 rental structures	1997-2000	City UDD
Increase the number of owner occupied dwellings	Provide funding for the purchase and rehabilitation of 20 single family rental units by owner occupants	1997-2000	City UDD
	Develop a marketing/promotional package to encourage homebuyers to purchase in the area	1998	City UDD
	Develop incentive programs for investor owners to sell to owner occupants	1997-1998	City UDD
Ensure that the City's Minimum Housing Code is met	Evaluate existing housing stock to determine substandard conditions. Make appropriate referrals.	1997	City-UDD
	Provide housing code inspection services to those property owners whose dwellings do not meet minimum housing code	1997-2000	City-Build/Safety
	Improve Certificate of Compliance Procedure so that changes in ownership don't slip through "cracks"	1997-1998	City-Build/Safety
	Implement licensure of one- and two-family rental structures	1997-1998	City-Build/Safety
	Require interior inspections of licensed units	1997-1998	City-Build/Safety

Environmental Goals	Actions	Schedule	Who
Clear alleys and other public r.o.w. of overgrown vegetation, volunteer trees, etc.	Expand weed ordinance to include volunteer trees	1997-1998	City-Health
Abate solid waste problems, including junk cars, garbage, litter, porch couches, junk tires, etc.	Establish amnesty days for junk cars, other solid waste	1997-1998	City-Health
	Establish summer youth clean-up teams	1997-1998	City-Health
	Establish ordinance requiring garbage service for all rental properties	1997-1998	City-Health

Crime & Security Goals	Actions	Schedule	Who
Improve the security of the residents and properties in the focus area	Assess lighting needs for apartment parking areas, alleys, and sidewalks, and make appropriate recommendations/requests for additional street lighting	1997-1998	NSNA, FACTeam
	Assess effectiveness of ordinance requiring non-intrusive lighting in parking lots	1997-1998	FACTeam
	Explore feasibility of installing pedestrian lighting on private property	1997-1998	City-UDD

Area Strategies

Land Use Goals	Actions	Schedule	Who
Decrease the density of the area	Develop incentives for the deconversion (either complete or reduction in units) of single family dwellings that have been converted to multiples	1997-1998	City-UDD
	Investigate zoning solutions to reduce or freeze density	1997-1998	NSNA FACTeam

Recreational Facilities & Green Space Goals	Actions	Schedule	Who
Begin implementation of the Capitol Environs plan for the South Mall	Work with the Capitol Environs Commission to coordinate activities	1997-2000	NSNA City-UDD
	Work with Lincoln Electric System to establish a schedule to bury power lines along the south mall	1997-2000	NSNA City UDD
	Work with adjacent property owners to obtain buy-in to plan (i.e., tree removal/replacement, etc.)	1997-2000	NSNA Capitol Environs
	Work with Parks Department/City Forester to coordinate activities	1997-2000	NSNA City-Parks
	Apply for landscaping funding through the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum's Green Space Stewardship Initiative	1997-2000	NSNA
Support the development of the South Central Community Center, working to ensure access to facility/programs by all neighborhoods in area (i.e., South Salt Creek, Everett, etc.)	Complete construction of the South Central Community Center Facility.	1998-1999	City of Lincoln LPS
	Work with Parks and Recreation Department to develop a transportation strategy (i.e., shuttle) for children, youth, and elderly persons in adjacent areas	1999-2000	City-Parks LPS NSNA
Increase recreational facilities in neighborhood	Work with churches in area to provide outdoor playspace (i.e. basketball, etc.) in parking lots	1997-1999	City-Parks Private
Remove dead trees or trim dead limbs from trees on private property	Provide financial assistance to property owners for tree management/maintenance activities	1997-2000	City-UDD

Infrastructure Goals	Actions	Schedule	Who
Improve deteriorated street surfaces	Resurfacing of 17th Street, from A to K, including curb cuts, wheelchair ramps and gutters, as needed	1997-1998	City-PW/U
Improve deteriorated sidewalks	Complete sidewalk survey	1997	City-PW/U
	Repair and replace sidewalks, as indicated by PW survey	1997-1998	City-PW/U
Improve storm drainage in focus area	Complete storm sewer improvements	1997-1998	City-PW/U
Improve deteriorated alley surfaces	Complete survey of alleyways and complete repairs	1997-2000	City-PW/U
Replace bus stop shelters in focus area with shelters designed to be compatible with architecture in area	Investigate alternative bus shelter design and associated costs	1998-1999	City-StarTran

Near South Focus Area Strategies

Increase owner-occupancy

Abate junk & litter problems

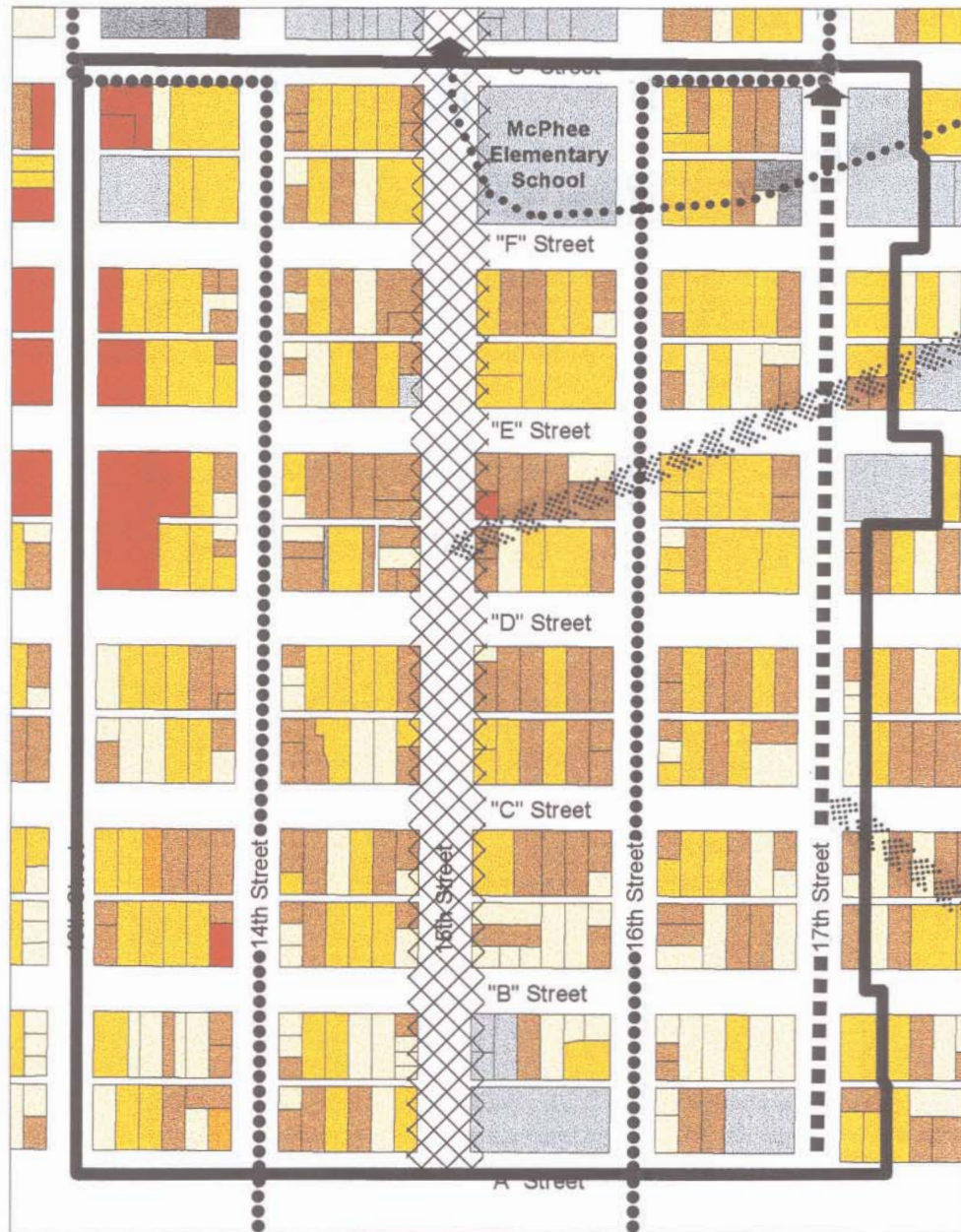
Clear alleys & other public r.o.w. of overgrown vegetation

Rehabilitate existing housing stock and sites, using City Code if necessary

Improve deteriorated infrastructure -- survey, replace & repair as needed

Improve security by assessing lighting needs & ordinances, exploring possibilities of pedestrian lighting

Decrease density using deconversion incentives, investigating zoning solutions



State Capitol Bldg.

Begin to implement the Capitol Environs (---) plan for South Mall --or 15th Street -- south of the Capitol Bldg.

Support the development of the South Central Community Ctr.

Improve neighborhood recreational opportunities

Remove or trim dead or damaged trees on private property

Resurface 17th St., "A" to "K"

Replace bus stop shelters with more compatibly designed shelters

Focus Area Boundary
Commercial
Industrial
Public and Semi-Public
No Land Use Information Available

Single Family Residential
Townhouses
Multi-Family Residential
Duplexes
Houses Converted to Apartments
Fraternity/Sorority
Condominium